

COCHIN MURALS

BY

V. R. CHITRA and T. N. SRINIVASAN M.A.

TEXT

for Volumes I and II



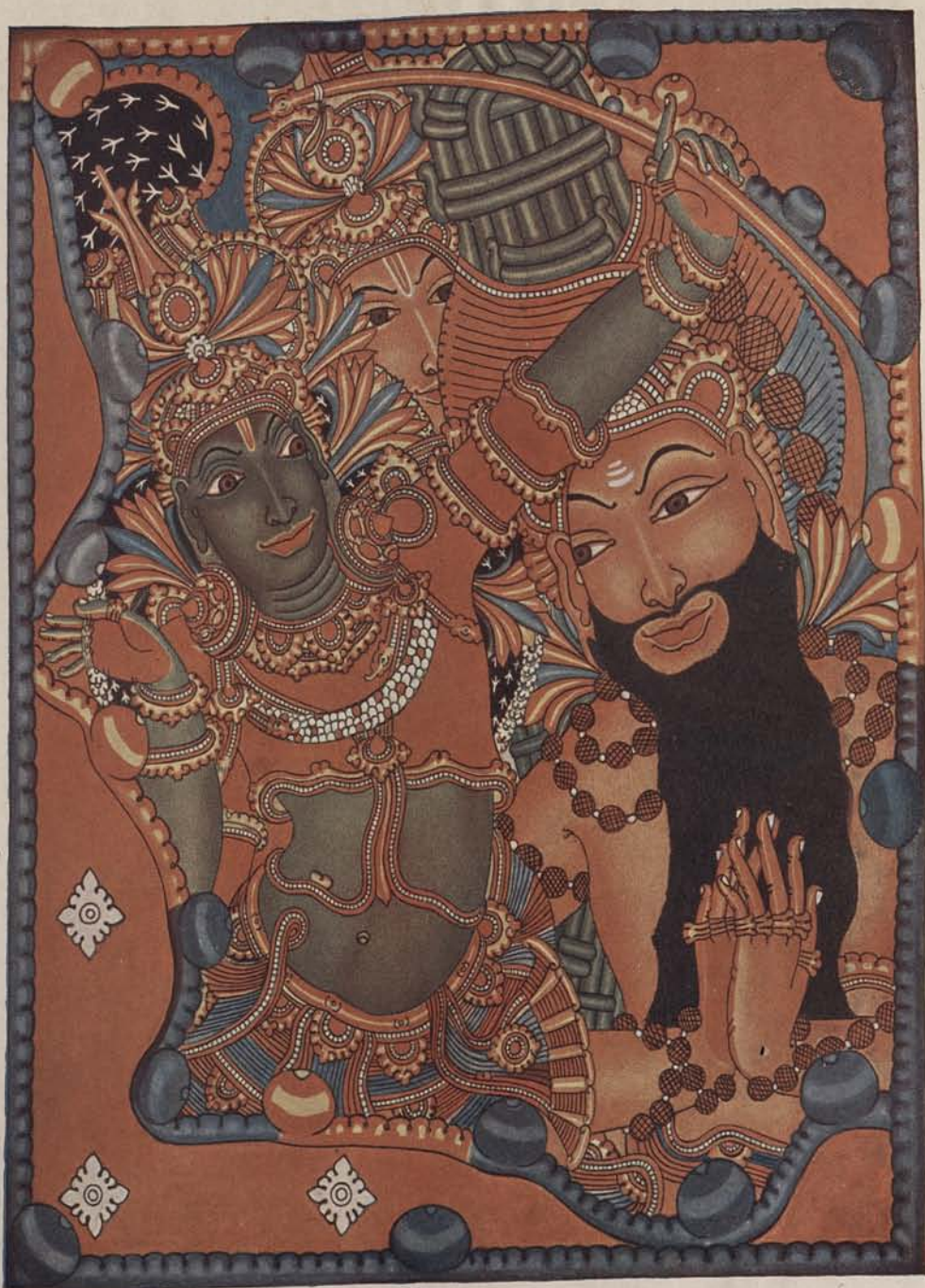
PUBLISHED UNDER THE SPECIAL AUTHORITY
OF HIS HIGHNESS THE MAHARAJAH OF COCHIN

1940



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RAMA AND PARASURAMA

COCHIN MURALS

COLLOTYPE REPRODUCTIONS OF THE MURAL
PAINTINGS OF COCHIN, BASED ON
PHOTOGRAPHY

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PREFACE

TO discover anything worth preserving is to find out the need of one or more subsequent alternatives—either to organise the preservation of the discovered object in its own location or to create a new location for it. In the case of mural paintings which are worth preserving, there may be the double necessity of retaining the originals as long as possible and at the same time of housing authentic copies of them for the study of experts and the edification of the general public. Lovers of art, who are unable to see the actual paintings, can satisfy their longing by seeing faithful reproductions of the originals.

Of late, in various parts of India, archaeological discoveries have led to the realisation of the fact that treasures of art, vast in quantity and and superb in quality, have lain hidden for centuries, with the resultant incalculable loss of the knowledge of the past eras of history and an equal loss of inspiration to contemporaneous art expression. These discoveries, which have pushed the art history of India as far back as five thousand years ago, have led to a further and somewhat disturbing discovery. The index of achievement in the arts has, with occasional efforts at recovery, steadily fallen in the course of ages from various forms of perfection to almost universal mediocrity or worse. These treasures of art were, however known to the local inhabitants, as most of them were paintings done on temple-walls and other historic landmarks familiar to them ; though they never felt the necessity to have them broadcasted, so to say, to the world at large.

The Kerala region, on the western coast of India, has shared in this double discovery with the difference that its era of neglect has been much shorter than that of other regions. Occasional items have been found there going back to the ninth century A.D. ; but the mural

paintings now reproduced may be taken in the main to be the work of artists belonging to the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. Though comparatively recent in age, these murals have a special significance in that they belong to an exclusive school of artists, whose technique and workmanship is considerably different from what we know to be the characteristics of the other schools of Indian art. These paintings, though not of hoary antiquity, throw fresh light on the range of the characteristics of Indian painting. Besides, being uninfluenced by the Moghal, Rajput and other schools, they are singularly Hindu in conception and orthodox in style. Further, they facilitate, to a great extent, the interpreting of the singular customs and manners of the people of Kerala. They also form an authoritative background to understand their unique 'Kathakali'—the peculiar form of dance.

In placing this set of two volumes of Collotype reproductions of Cochin Murals before the public for the present, the authors desire first to humbly pay their respects to His Highness the Maharaja of Cochin, but for whose interest, it would have been impossible to make this venture. Primarily it started from the circumstance that His Highness desired to have faithful copies of these murals made, so that, if the originals perish, the copies at least could be preserved. For this purpose the services of one of us Mr. V. R. Chitra was engaged; and he with the co-operation of some local artists, was able to get very faithful copies of the pictures made on special boards imported for this purpose, in the colours used by the original masters and in the same technique. Later on, the idea of housing these faithful copies in a prominent place in the State, so that tourists and art lovers can have the benefit of seeing them occurred to the Dewan. He was responsible therefore for bringing into existence, the Art Gallery, now housed in a specially-built spacious building at Trichur. When this was being done, the natural temptation to increase the value of these murals by presenting them in a book form took shape; and when Mr. Chitra went to Japan, he got into touch with Messrs. Benrido Printing Co., the foremost fine-art printers in the East, who are responsible for reproducing in original size (10' x 4') copies of the famous Buddhist frescoes in Horyoji monastery in Nara, Japan, which are believed to have been executed in fifth century A.D. Thus, it may be said that it was purely out of love and regard for Indian

Art, that they have undertaken to print these art plates rather than for any monetary consideration they may get from the work. All the plates again are printed on genuine hand-made paper, the Torinoko paper of Japan, the best and the finest hand-made paper ever made. Messrs. Benrido have printed the plates in Collotype, a process till now exclusively confined to important printers in Europe. We wish to mention here that the original scheme was to publish, as Volume I, that wonderful unfinished masterpiece now existing only as line drawing depicting 'Uma Parinayam' or the marriage of Siva. In fact, this would have materialised, but for the present political convulsion, which prevents the execution of the work by our printers in time to go along with the other two volumes. Our readers would be glad to know that this scene is a remarkable piece of nearly 30 feet in length and we have now made all the necessary arrangements to bring this panel, in a manner befitting its grandeur and hope to be able to place it for sale at an early date, as Volume III of this publication.

Our thanks are specially due to Sir R. K. Shanmukham Chettiar, K.C.I.E., Dewan of Cochin, who from the very beginning has given every encouragement and support for bringing this gigantic work to completion. Considering the rigid strictness which has been observed by the Government of Cochin in even permitting anybody to take photographic copies of these paintings, we must acknowledge our indebtedness to the enlightened and art-minded Dewan for encouraging the publication of a few of the original murals in the present form. No doubt these paintings cannot be regarded as discoveries; but as they have been made available for the first time to a wider circle of art lovers, we except that these paintings, just like new discoveries, would go a long way to fill some at least of the blanks in the history of Indian art. Our indebtedness to Professor V. Rangacharya, Retired Professor of Indian History, Presidency College, Madras, requires special mention as he was pleased to go through the manuscript of the text and give us very valuable suggestions. Further we are glad that he has contributed a most interesting article on the historical background of these arts to form part of this text. Mr. G. Venkatachalam, the well-known art critic of South India, has given a short note on some of the aesthetical aspects of Indian murals, and in his own inimitable way given a frank

